

ATOMS FOR PEACE

Truman Was Right to Drop the Bomb

ADAM MEYERSON

No American can look back happily on President Harry Truman's decision to drop the atom bomb. At least 120,000 and perhaps as many as 240,000 Japanese civilians perished in the blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Tens of thousands more suffered excruciating pain from burns and sores, or died prematurely as the result of exposure to radiation. Most of the victims were women and children. And ever since, Americans have been troubled by the misery we inflicted on a nation that we now have the good fortune of calling our friend.

But (earlier) But this summer, as we approach the 40th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki tragedies, it is important to remember a simple chronology. Hiroshima was obliterated on August 6, 1945, Nagasaki on August 9. One day after

the second bomb, on August 10, the Empire of Japan announced its willingness to abide by the surrender terms of the Potsdam Declaration, so long as the institution of the Emperor were preserved. The United States immediately accepted, and by August 15, the most infernal war in modern history was over. In short, the two atom bombs

did exactly what President Truman hoped they would. They shocked Japan into surrendering, without the need for a bloody American invasion of the Japanese archipelago. In so doing, they shortened the war by as much as a year. And they saved hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of American and Japanese lives.

NO (skip repeat stories like June) Yankee troops were scheduled to land on Kyushu in November 1945, and on the central island of Honshu the following March. There can be no doubt that the battles would have been more destructive than the devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. General Marshall predicted a quarter of a million to a million American casualties, with as many or more Japanese deaths. And the experience of other great battles in 1945 made it clear that civilians would bear the brunt of the violence. A hundred thousand Filipino civilians perished along with 16,000 Japanese occupation troops in the defense of Manila, and the city itself suffered greater destruction than any Allied metropolis except Warsaw. The last-ditch defense of Okinawa took the lives of between 40,000 and 70,000 Okinawan civilians, many committing hara-kiri rather than be conquered by the foreign devils.

Of course, there are some who thought that an invasion was unnecessary, and that a naval blockade would be enough to force a Japanese surrender. This was a widely held view in the U.S. Navy, and it would have been a realistic one if Japan had been governed by men who cared much about the survival of their compatriots. By the summer of 1945, Japan was in little position to fight. Most of its war factories had been demolished in the firebombing raids that left Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kobe, Yokohama, and Kawasaki in ruins and 13 million Japanese without homes. Replenishments for low fuel and food supplies would have to cross the seas, where they would be at the mercy of American submarines.

The bleakness of Japan's military prospects was fully recognized by a growing "peace party" in Tokyo that included the prime minister, the foreign minister, and Emperor Hirohito. On July 12, 1945, the foreign minister sent a diplomatic cable, read by American codebreakers, saying that "His Majesty is deeply reluctant to have any further blood lost among people on both sides and it is his desire, for the welfare of humanity, to restore peace with all possible speed." It is frequently claimed that peace would have been possible without either an invasion or the bomb, if Truman had paid more attention to such signals.

The trouble with this argument is that the "peace party" did not control Japan's guns, and its views did not prevail in the Supreme Council that made the war decisions. The fanatically suicidal war minister, General Korechika Anami, and the army and navy chiefs of staff, Yoshijuro Umezu and Admiral Soemi Toyoda, remained opposed to surrender under virtually every circumstance. On June 8, 1945, the cabinet resolved to "prosecute the war to the bitter end." On July 27, it decided to treat the Allied surrender terms of the Potsdam Declaration with "silent contempt." The *Mainichi*, one of Tokyo's leading dailies, called the Allied ultimatum a "laughable matter."

The Emperor, meanwhile, looked on in dismay as he saw his country being destroyed. He had opposed the war from the very beginning, but though he was universally revered by his subjects, he was essentially a figurehead in

ADAM MEYERSON is editor of Policy Review.

and confusion from lucidity. History provides us with a sense of perspective and with the ability to make critical judgments. As the distinguished historian, Felix Gilbert, has observed, "The past is one way—and not the worst way—of acquiring the right and the criteria to judge the present." And acquiring the criteria to judge the present, it seems to me, is no less vital to the success and well-being of democratic self-government than acquiring a sense of community.

The Danger of Ignorance

But again, in being exposed to the truth about our history, our students, of course, should be exposed to the whole truth. So let it be told. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan puts it:

Am I embarrassed to speak for a less than perfect democracy? Not one bit. Find me a better one. Do I suppose there are societies which are free of sin? No I don't. Do I think ours is on balance incomparably the most hopeful set of human relations the world has? Yes I do. Have we done obscene things? Yes we have. How did our people learn about them? They learned about them on television. In the newspapers.

Unfortunately, even the subject of history is in danger of losing its distinct identity, of becoming absorbed in the smorgasbord of this and that known as "social studies." The Council for Basic Education noted in its 1982 report, *Making History Come Alive*:

In most schools today, the subject of history is subsumed by the curricular genus of 'social studies.' Teachers of history belong to social studies departments, they commonly identify themselves as social studies teachers, and they teach other subjects in addition to history. Parents are likely to presume that if their children are taking any social studies courses, they are learning history. They may or they may not be.

The Council for Basic Education report largely confirmed the findings of a 1975 study conducted by the Organization of American Historians. The OAH study noted a significant decline in the teaching of secondary school history throughout the country. It found that in some states "virtually no training in history is demanded" of secondary school history teachers. In one state, history teachers were being encouraged to emphasize concepts that transcend "any given historical situation." In another state, the trend was toward ethnocultural courses; in another, the focus was on problem solving, decision making, and social action. And in another, the OAH representative predicted that history would soon be supplanted by more "relevant" courses such as consumer affairs, ecology, multicultural studies, and so on.

The present decline in the status of history in our schools is very serious. To be ignorant of history is to be, in a very fundamental way, intellectually defenseless, unable to understand the workings either of our own society or of other societies. It is to be condemned to what Walter Lippmann called a state of "chronic childishness." Lippmann continued:

Men must collaborate with their ancestors. Otherwise they must begin, not where their ancestors arrived but where their ancestors began. If they exclude the tradition of the past from the curricula of the schools they make it necessary for each generation to repeat the errors rather than benefit by the successes of its predecessors.

Such a situation is intolerable. In order to change it, I propose an intellectual initiative designed to transmit our social and political values, to generate individual intelligence, and to provide our young people with the perspective they need to function effectively in today's world. At the core of this intellectual initiative—yes, it too is a kind of defense initiative—lies an enhanced appreciation of the role and value of the study of history. Specifically, then, I advocate consideration of the following program:

Even the subject of history is in danger of losing its distinct identity.

First, our schools should treat history as an autonomous discipline, related to, but distinct from, the social studies. This history must be sure to teach the events and the principles that have formed modern states.

Second, local communities should agree (and they can agree) on what constitutes a minimum of historical knowledge which every high school graduate, regardless of whether he or she goes on to college, must master.

Third, just as math and physics must be taught by persons who know their subject, so history must be taught by people who know history. As the Council for Basic Education has pointed out, "The preparation of history teachers should include concentration in history, taught by historians and augmented by significant study in such related fields as literature, the arts, anthropology, and the social sciences."

If taught honestly and truthfully, the study of history will give our students a grasp of their nation, a nation that the study of history and current events will reveal is still, indeed, "the last best hope on earth." Our students should know that. They *must* know that, because nations can be destroyed from without, but they can also be destroyed from within.

Americans are the heirs of a precious historical legacy. Let it never be said of us that we failed as a nation because we neglected to pass on this legacy to our children. Remember that whatever our ancestry of blood, in one sense we all have the same fathers—our Founding Fathers. Let it be said that we told our children the whole story, our long record of glories, failures, aspirations, sins, achievements, and victories. Then let us leave them to determine their own views of it all: America in the totality of its acts. If we can dedicate ourselves to that endeavor, I am confident that our students will discern in the story of their past the truth. They will cherish that truth. And it will help to keep them free.

the councils of government. So sacred was his throne that none dared ask his opinion during cabinet debates. Instead, his silence was interpreted as assent to decisions that had previously been made without his presence.

All this changed with the shock of atomic annihilation. The Emperor was so mortified by the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and so appalled by the suicidal response of Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda to the bombings—even after the news of Nagasaki, they were still holding out against surrender—that on the evening of August 9, he did what he had never done before. He intervened in a cabinet meeting to declare his opinions. “The time has come when we must bear the unbearable,” he proclaimed, and the next day his government signalled its acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration that it had seemingly rejected only two weeks before.

Was the second bomb dropped too soon after the first to give Japan an opportunity to surrender? Perhaps. The meeting that culminated in the Emperor’s extraordinary intervention began one minute before Fat Man, as the Nagasaki weapon was called, was unloaded. But the fact remains that Japan’s first surrender message came on August 10, not August 7, and even then, it was not clear that Japan’s militarist fanatics would allow Japan to capitulate. In fact, a palace revolt on August 14 and August 15 nearly prevented the broadcast of the Emperor’s surrender proclamation.

Some critics of Truman will reject all the above analysis, and say that he could have avoided the need for any bombing at all if he had been willing to accept something less than unconditional surrender—for instance, a negotiated peace that would have stripped Japan of its imperial possessions but spared it the indignity of capitulation. But it must be remembered that Japan had started the war in the Pacific with its savage invasion of China, its lightning conquest of Southeast Asia, and its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor; and that Japanese troops had committed abominations that rivalled Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in their barbarism. Japanese troops massacred 200,000 Chinese civilians in the Rape of Nanking. They doused the hospital patients of Manila with gasoline and set them aflame. They used live prisoners of war for bayonet practice and vivisection experiments, or else fed them starvation rations. And their bombers mercilessly attacked the civilians of Shanghai and Mandalay long before American B-29s began their firebombing raids on Japan. It was entirely reasonable to insist on the unconditional surrender of the regime that had sponsored these atrocities, and to make sure that no Japanese regime would ever again be tempted into aggression.

In this connection, it was especially important not to repeat the mistakes of Allied policy at the end of World War I, in which the Armistice of 1918 was followed by the outbreak of World War II only 20 years later. The Allies did not decisively defeat the army of the Kaiser in 1918, and they did not bring the war home to the German people. Instead, they negotiated a peace settlement while German troops were still in foreign territory, with the result that the German people, denied true information about the war by the Kaiser’s totalitarian control of the press, did not know that their country had been losing the war. When

combined with the vindictive reparations that the Allies exacted against Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, this policy fanned the resentment of the German people and gave credence to the “stab in the back” theory that gave impetus to Hitler’s rise to power.

The two atom bombs did exactly what Truman hoped they would. They shocked Japan into surrendering, without the need for a bloody American invasion of the Japanese archipelago.

The American policy of 1945 was the reverse of the Allies’ in 1918. It was to win the war against Japan (and Germany) decisively, and then to treat the vanquished with friendship and magnanimity. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese people could have no illusions about which side won the war, and they had been taught a terrible lesson about the consequences of their rulers’ militarism. But the surrender of Japan was followed by the most humane occupation in Asian history. American troops were severely punished if they so much as struck a Japanese. The Japanese economy was quickly rebuilt with American help, and in the Pax Americana of relatively free trade, the Japanese were able to channel their extraordinary energies into conquering markets rather than territories. And thanks in part to many of the reforms that were instituted during the American occupation, Japan today enjoys a thriving democracy, the longest lifespans in the world, and cordial relations with its neighbors.

Indeed, one of the advantages of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings is that, by ending the war when they did, they allowed Japan to be occupied by the United States alone, and not also by the Soviet Union. Stalin, who entered the war against Japan on August 9, 1945, had set his sights on Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan’s four main islands, and it is likely that he would have landed there if the war had been prolonged and the United States forced to invade Japan. How traumatic this would have been for Hokkaido can be judged by the experience of Japanese soldiers who surrendered to the Soviets in Manchuria: 350,000 of them were sent to slave labor in Siberia, while Manchuria’s factories were dismantled and shipped to Russia as war reparations. A Soviet occupation of Hokkaido might also have led to a permanently divided Japan on the model of Germany and Korea.

The decision to drop the atomic bomb, like all military decisions, must be evaluated in the context of the circumstances at the time and the information then available to President Truman. The bomb has, thankfully, never been used again. But compared with the alternatives available to Truman in 1945, America’s “first use” of nuclear weapons was humane and just.

THE FEMINIST MISTAKE

Sexual Equality and the Decline of the American Military

JEAN YARBROUGH

The United States is the only major country to consider seriously the question of women in combat. Of the 72 nations that register or conscript citizens for military service, only 10 include women and none places them in combat. Although women are still excluded from combat by law in the Navy and the Air Force, and by policy in the Army, the United States has moved closer to placing women in combat than any other country. Not only have women moved into "combat related" tasks, but the distinction between combatants and non-combatants has been blurred by the inclusion of women in "technical" combat positions, such as missile launch officers, which would be prime targets in a war.

It is true that women have fought in combat in the past. Sexual egalitarians point approvingly to the heroism of Soviet women during World War II and, more recently, to the combat role of women in the Israeli army. But in the Soviet Union, women fought out of dire necessity, not ideological conviction, and in all-female units. The case of Israel is even more interesting. Partly for ideological, mostly for military reasons, Israel sent women into combat in 1948. But they were withdrawn in three weeks. Israeli men proved more protective of the women, jeopardizing their own missions to save them. And Israeli commanders found that Arab forces fought with greater determination against female units to avoid the humiliation of being defeated by women; as a result, casualties on both sides were higher. If the Israelis could not change the attitudes of their own soldiers toward women, still less could they raise the consciousness of their enemy.

Far more instructive is the present policy of both these countries. Of an estimated 4.4 million member force, the Soviet Union employs approximately 10,000 women, all in traditional female tasks. There is not one woman general officer in the entire Soviet military. Today, Israeli women are drafted, but not for combat. Although they are given defensive weapons training, their function is to free Israeli men to fight.

In the United States, feminists support women in combat for ideological reasons—they regard it as a measure of equity—while some military professionals see it as a measure of expediency. The debate took hold in the early

1970s, when the proposed Equal Rights Amendment seemed to be prospering. The Supreme Court for the first time invalidated a number of sex-based classifications, and the federal courts then extended the principle to the military. Abandoning the judiciary's traditional deference to Congress on military policy, the federal courts greatly broadened the rights of women in the military in a series of cases in the mid and late 1970s.

Congress entered the picture when it voted to end the draft in 1973, resulting in a decline in the number of qualified men joining the armed forces. To compensate, the Pentagon sought to attract more women; during the 1970s, the number of women in the military increased by more than 350 percent, to 150,000. In 1975, Congress opened the service academies to women, and the Army began to narrow its definition of combat to routine direct combat and to assign women to positions previously classified as combat. Women were assigned to combat "support" units, in which they would certainly be shot at, and were trained in the use of light anti-tank weapons, M-16 rifles, grenade launchers, claymore mines, and M-60 machine guns. Under pressure from the courts, the Defense Department also revised its regulations so that pregnancy was no longer grounds for automatic dismissal.

Registration Roulette

With the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, the pace of change accelerated. Two independent studies recommended recruiting more women for reasons of both economy and quality; one concluded the services could perform their mission with one-third female personnel. Field experiments conducted by the Army Research Institute concluded that difficulties attributable to the presence of women in the field were due chiefly to training and leadership problems that could be solved. In response to a court order, Congress enacted legislation in 1978 permitting women to serve on non-combat ships and combat ships for up to 180 days. Co-ed basic training was also launched. The following year, the Air Force opened pilot and naviga-

JEAN YARBROUGH is a professor of political science at Loyola University in Chicago.